

THE
LEADERSHIP
STYLE
OF
JESUS

HOW TO MAKE
A LASTING IMPACT

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Chapter 10

Power

Jesus did everything wrong, according to the leadership wisdom of this world.

There are essentially two classic leadership models today, and the leadership style of Jesus is unquestionably the minority view. The more commonly accepted leadership model is descended from the writings of Italian politician and humanist philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527). In his book *The Prince*, he advocated a style of leadership rooted solely in the pursuit of power.

order to acquire and maintain power, then he should not hesitate to do so.

Machiavelli's *The Prince* has had a widespread influence through the centuries. Leaders who have read and adopted the leadership style of Machiavelli include England's ruthless chief minister Thomas Cromwell, who served the equally ruthless King Henry VIII (who ultimately turned on Cromwell and executed him); Spain's Charles V, a greedy and ruthless monarch who launched many wars and

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Machiavelli taught that leaders must be ruthless in the pursuit of power, that they should maintain an outwardly moral reputation but be willing to act immorally to maintain power. Machiavelli is credited with originating the saying, “the ends justify the means”—the notion that even immoral actions are justified if they produce a desirable outcome. According to Machiavelli, if a leader must use brutal force, deception, coercion, or the elimination of rivals in

opposed the Protestant Reformation; Catherine de Médicis, who instigated the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre against French Protestants; the Scottish atheist philosopher David Hume; and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, who killed millions of his own people in forced labor camps and deliberately engineered famines. (Stalin read *The Prince* many times, underlining and scribbling notes in the margins.)

To this day, a scheming leader who

will do anything for the sake of power is described as “Machiavellian.” Niccolò Machiavelli advocated a leadership style based on amorality, deception, power, ego, and personal advantage. By contrast, Jesus of Nazareth taught and modeled a leadership style based on morality, truthfulness, servant-hood, humility, and meeting the needs of others.

Jesus started with a motley group of twelve followers. None were well-educated. Some were undoubtedly illiterate. One was a traitor. Yet with that small group, Jesus changed history and impacted the entire world. We date our calendars by his life. So I ask you, would you rather follow the leadership model of Machiavelli or the leadership style of Jesus?

While Jesus did not pursue power at any cost in the way that Machiavelli advocates, he did not condemn the use of power per se. But Jesus differed from the standard secular model of leadership in the way he viewed power.

First, let’s define what we mean by power. In a leadership context, I define power as “the ability to influence, inspire, or induce behavior in others.” In leadership, there are two kinds of power: position power and personal power.

Position power refers to the influence leaders have because of the position they hold in the organization. An employee might not volunteer for a certain task if a coworker asked him to do it. But if his superior—a person with the power of position in the organization—asks

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Two Kinds of Power

When people think of leadership, they usually think of power. The issue of power applies to leadership in every arena of human endeavor: business, education, church, and home. Anywhere two or more people gather together to achieve a goal or purpose, power comes into play.

him to do it, that employee will probably volunteer in a heartbeat. A powerful position gives one clout to command, motivate, and even intimidate others in the organization.

One of the leadership challenges Jesus faced as he taught and mentored the disciples was teaching them a completely

new kind of leadership, a new kind of power. They thought his kingdom would be a worldly kingdom, and his power would be worldly political power.

In Matthew 20, James and John, along with their mother, take Jesus aside to ask for a favor. Their mother does the

my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.”

The other ten disciples heard about what James and John and their mother had done, trying to jump to the head of the line for high positions in the coming

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talking, asking Jesus to promise he'll give her boys positions on his right and left hand. In other words, she wanted King Jesus to make her sons the chancellor and prime minister of the kingdom. James, John, and their mother were thinking about position power. They wanted Jesus to give them the positions so they would have the power.

But as Jesus would later tell Pontius Pilate, his kingdom was not of this world. His power was not worldly power, the power of position. So Jesus told this mother and her sons, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?”

“We are able,” they replied.

“You will drink my cup,” Jesus said somberly, knowing that James and John would become martyrs for the Christian faith, “but to sit at my right hand and at

kingdom. They too were thinking of the kingdom of Jesus as a worldly kingdom based on worldly position power.

But Jesus rebuked them all, saying, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (see Matthew 20:20-28).

This was one of several instances where Jesus had to rebuke the disciples for their worldly, even Machiavellian view of leadership and power. On several occasions, he had to teach them that his leadership style is based instead on servanthood.

On another occasion, Jesus and the disciples were walking to Capernaum. The Twelve, thinking Jesus couldn't hear them, argued among themselves. But when they reached their destination, Jesus asked, "What were you discussing on the way?"

The shame-faced disciples couldn't answer, because they had argued about which among them was the greatest. So Jesus told them once again that his style

inspire people through personal power, even in seemingly hopeless situations.

In May 1940, during the darkest days of World War II, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill stood before the House of Commons and delivered a speech that was broadcast by radio to the entire nation. In the course of that speech, he said these words: "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat. We have before us an ordeal of the

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Personal power comes from one's charisma and personality. A leader who projects confidence, strength, hope, optimism, and sincerity can always inspire people through personal power, even in seemingly hopeless situations.

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of leadership was not about who was the greatest or who had the top position. "If anyone would be first," Jesus said, "he must be last of all and servant of all" (see Mark 9:33-35).

Over and over, Jesus taught his disciples this new and paradoxical form of leadership: In the kingdom of Jesus, the leader is the one who serves, and the servant is the one who leads. Jesus came to stand position power on its head.

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most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and of suffering."

Those are dark and depressing words, and Churchill was giving the British people a realistic assessment of the crisis they faced. As ink on paper, those words cause the soul to sink into despair. Yet, when spoken by Churchill, those words actually had the effect of lifting the morale and igniting the fighting spirit of the British people.

With his bulldog swagger, Churchill went on to say, "You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: Victory.

Victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be, for without victory there is no survival.”

Winston Churchill did not sugarcoat the problems they faced. He communicated the enormity of the crisis in no uncertain terms—but he focused on the task ahead through the lens of his personal power, his infectious confidence, his defiant courage. And the result was that a seemingly defeated nation experienced a resurgent morale. The people of Great Britain rallied behind him, battled bravely, and fulfilled his promise of victory.

and legislation in Washington, DC, and even distorting God’s truth in pulpits across the country.

Charming, manipulative leaders can acquire tyrannical powers. It happened in Germany in the 1930s, when a man with a gift of persuasive oratory led Nazi Germany—and the entire world—into global war. It happened in a different way in 1978 when a charming and manipulative preacher named Jim Jones led nearly a thousand followers, including two hundred children, to death by mass murder-suicide in Jonestown, Guyana.

Personal power can be a great force for good when wielded by a great leader like

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Those who charm us with their personal magnetism, those who sway us with their persuasive words, may be very effective leaders, but where are they leading us?

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Of course, there is always a danger in personal power. In our media age, there is the increasing possibility that we will give power and influence to demagogues—to skilled manipulators with superficial charm but without the experience, ability, values, and character that make an authentic leader. There are already many superficially charming people who are distorting popular opinion on our TV screens, producing distorted policy

Winston Churchill. But personal power cannot be trusted. Those who charm us with their personal magnetism, those who sway us with their persuasive words, may be very effective leaders, but where are they leading us? Personal power sometimes leads to destruction.

The Five Power Plays

Worldly leaders employ a number of techniques to maintain their power.

They will use position power, personal power, or a combination of both in order to manipulate people and achieve their ends. They generally maintain power through what I call “The Five Power Plays.” Let’s examine these Power Plays one by one.

Rosalynn Carter, and Vice President Walter Mondale. Outwardly, Jim Jones had an aura of respectability on a national stage and was considered a pillar of the community.

Jones attracted crowds of followers to his People’s Temple—and he used

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Authentic leaders motivate and inspire their followers with truth, logic, facts, and reason . . .

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Power Play 1: Manipulation

The infamous Jim Jones of Jonestown stands out as an example of manipulation because he led so many people to a bizarre and sensational death by mass suicide. People look at that awful event in 1978 and say, “I don’t know how Jim Jones was able to manipulate so many people. He could never brainwash me into accepting such a fate!”

But is anyone truly immune to the power of manipulation of a charismatic personality? Jim Jones was, after all, a preacher and the founder of a large religious movement, the People’s Temple. He adopted children, preached a social gospel of racial tolerance, and set up outreach programs for the poor. He gained credibility by associating with prominent politicians such as San Francisco Mayor George Moscone (who appointed him chairman of the Housing Authority Commission), First Lady

methods of manipulation to keep them there. He played on people’s fears, warning against a coming nuclear apocalypse. Authentic leaders motivate and inspire their followers with truth, logic, facts, and reason, while manipulators like Jim Jones use fear and irrational emotion to keep people in line. Manipulators are psychological bullies who intimidate insecure people with lines like, “You don’t want people to think you are uncooperative and not giving your best to God, do you?” Or “People tell me that you’re a troublemaker, and I want you to prove them wrong.” Jim Jones always knew the right words to say to silence objections and keep people under his thumb.

It’s instructive to note that Jim Jones used the same manipulative tactics that the leaders of the Pharisee cult used in Jesus’s day. In John 7, the Pharisees, the bitter enemies of Jesus, wanted to arrest

Jesus and do away with him without trial. Nicodemus, the Pharisee who had earlier visited Jesus by night, protested, “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?”

Enraged, the other Pharisees ganged up on him and replied, “Are you from Galilee too?” The Judean Jews looked down on the Galileans, and the not-too-subtle implication of that question was that if Nicodemus defended Jesus the Galilean, they might treat Nicodemus as a Galilean as well. They didn’t have to use an open threat—a single question was

Take, for example, this story from a woman named Jessie who worked in an office in New York City:

I always feel stupid in front of my boss. The other day, when I walked into the office in my running shoes, he asked me why I was wearing them. I told him I had power-walked to work. He said, “Do people still power-walk in New York City?” I laughed at his comment but couldn’t believe I said something so stupid. I wanted to crawl in a hole. I can never say anything smart in front of the boss. I feel like he thinks I’m just some stupid girl in the office.

Abusive leaders often manipulate people with guilt feelings in order to maintain control over them.

sufficiently intimidating. Nicodemus said no more in defense of Jesus.

That is how manipulators get their way and maintain their power.

Power Play 2: Guilt or Shame

Leaders, by virtue of their powerful positions, have the ability to induce feelings of guilt and shame in their subordinates and followers. Abusive leaders often manipulate people with guilt feelings in order to maintain control over them.

Do you see what happened here? Jessie’s boss asked her a seemingly innocent question—yet that one question filled Jessie with self-doubt, shame, and feelings of inferiority. There’s nothing stupid about power-walking. It’s a perfectly legitimate form of exercise that is still practiced in New York City and all across the country. But this boss knew exactly how to twist the verbal knife and make Jessie doubt herself and feel insecure. Maybe this boss didn’t know the effect his words had on Jessie,

yet from her words it is clear that this was not the first conversation in which he had made her feel shame. I think it's safe to conclude that this was a manipulative power play this boss regularly used to keep an employee off balance and under his control.

Power Play 3: Intimidation

In his book *Toxic Emotions at Work*, Peter Frost relates the story of a corporate CEO who ruled by fear and intimidation. At meetings with his senior managers, he would invariably select one person as his victim, and he would verbally attack that person for several minutes. "The CEO seemed to be intentionally setting a tone," Frost wrote, "creating a level of fear and intimidation in the group that carried over into the agenda discussions."

On another occasion, that same CEO

the open office. When the abusive CEO began his rant, the manager asked that they go to a private office and conduct the rest of the discussion in a confidential setting. The CEO refused and continued haranguing and humiliating the man in front of his friends and peers. Then he punctuated the discussion by telling the man he was fired.

Clearly, the CEO's goal was to instill fear throughout his organization as a means of demonstrating his power and control. Peter Frost concludes that the CEO's plan backfired because "many of the staff members were angered and demoralized by the spectacle." The result of that fear-inducing symbolic public hanging was a "chain reaction of poorer performance and general discontent"—the exact opposite of the effect the CEO was trying to achieve.

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conducted the firing of one of his senior managers as a symbolic public hanging. First, he tipped off the rest of the staff that the firing would take place. Then he went into the manager's glass-walled office so that all the staff would be able to watch the drama from their own desks in

Richard D. Parsons, former CEO of Time Warner, recalled one boss he had early in his career—a boss who intimidated others with his explosive temper. On one occasion, the volatile boss blew up during a meeting, yelled at one employee and even threw things

at the unfortunate man. The worst moment came when the victim—a grown man—broke down and cried in front of everyone in the room.

For Parsons, it was a powerful lesson that intimidation undermines the entire organization. The fear factor, Parsons concluded, “tended to stifle, muffle,

What do you say?”

“Well,” Cathy replied, “I think the opposite. I think the kinder you are to your people, the more productive they will be and the more customers you will be able to attract. I think I kind of look upon being in the restaurant business as a divine calling.”

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... the most successful companies are often led by the kindest and most caring of CEOs.

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and impede effective communications, particularly bad news . . . No one wanted to set off this manager, so they didn't tell him things they thought he wouldn't be happy hearing.”

By contrast, the most successful companies are often led by the kindest and most caring of CEOs. One example is the Atlanta-based Chick-fil-A restaurant chain, founded in 1946 by Christian businessman S. Truett Cathy, who built his reputation on the leadership style of Jesus. He has always put faith, integrity, and people ahead of profits (for example, his restaurants are always closed on Sundays, giving his employees a biblical day of rest).

In an interview on Fox News Channel, host Neil Cavuto said, “Mr. Cathy, they say you can't be a nice guy in this business. It's a rough world, you have to be tough.

Power Play 4: Ridicule

I define ridicule as using humor as a weapon to hurt people. A sense of humor is a powerful and positive tool in the hands of an authentic, Christlike leader. But in the hands of an abusive, controlling boss or tyrant, humor becomes a weapon of control, usually in the form of mockery and ridicule.

Historian J. Michael Waller of the Institute of World Politics tells us that ridicule was a favorite technique of Adolf Hitler for maintaining control of his underlings—though the Führer himself could not take a joke. “Hitler's sense of humor knew no self-deprecation,” Waller writes. “His was what the Germans call *schadenfreude* . . . taking malicious pleasure at others' misfortune. Hitler loved cruel jokes on his own ministers, especially on Foreign Minister

Ribbentrop . . . He could never laugh at himself.”

Professor Bennett Tepper of Georgia State University conducted research on employees who worked for abusive bosses. His study involved more than seven hundred adults who worked at private, public, and nonprofit workplaces. His

But one day two Middle Eastern young men said to him, “You smile a lot, and that means you are happy and cooperative, does it not? And you say we do not have to go on some of the trips you have arranged. And you say it with a smile. But if we do not go, you also say words that make us know we have

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Sometimes, leaders can fall into the trap of using the power play of ridicule without even realizing it.

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findings, as reported by researcher Robert I. Sutton at the University of California at Berkeley, revealed many of these people “had bosses who used ridicule, put-downs, the silent treatment, and insults . . . These demeaning acts drove people to quit their jobs at higher rates and sapped the effectiveness of those who remained.” Employees who stayed on the job felt “reduced commitment to employers, and heightened depression, anxiety, and burnout.”

Sometimes, leaders can fall into the trap of using the power play of ridicule without even realizing it. A friend told me about a lesson he learned while working one Christmas season at a hostel for international students. A jolly and good-natured fellow, my friend seemed to work well with students from other cultures.

displeased and disappointed you. All the while, you continue smiling, even when you say things like, ‘You’re not too tired to go.’ Please forgive us, but we don’t understand.”

My friend instantly realized his error—and regretted it. On one level, he wanted everyone to attend every function, even though he told the students they didn’t have to. In an attempt to manipulate them into going, he would use a humorous jab, delivered with a smile, which he thought would soften the jab. Instead, the conflicting mixture of verbal and nonverbal messages he sent was confusing to the students.

“I learned a valuable lesson,” he told me. “I never realized before how I used a smile and belittling humor to get my way with people.”

A good sense of humor is an important leadership trait. If you read the gospels objectively, you find that Jesus had a finely tuned Middle Eastern sense of humor. He loved hyperbole, creating ridiculous word pictures to make a point while making his listeners laugh. The image of someone obsessing over a speck in his neighbor's eye while ignoring a

the emotions of your audience as long as your message is honest and supported by facts and reason. But all too often, when a leader doesn't have truth and logic on his side, he resorts to tricking his audience with emotional appeals. This is a ruthless power play that is unworthy of the leadership style of Jesus, whose message was always rooted in truth.

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There's nothing wrong with involving the emotions of your audience as long as your message is honest and supported by facts and reason.

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huge plank in his own eye is as funny as it is instructive. He also used word pictures of a camel trying to squeeze through the eye of a needle, and compared the absurd legalism of the Pharisees to straining a gnat out of one's drink, then swallowing a camel. In arguments, he used devastating logic and wit to expose the irrationality of his opponents' accusations.

But Jesus never used humor to belittle, shame, ridicule, or mock his followers. He always used humor to instruct and to build relationships. That's the leadership style of Jesus, and it's the model we should follow in our own leadership lives.

Power Play 5: Emotional Appeals

There's nothing wrong with involving

A prime example of a manipulative emotional appeal is the phrase "for the children." This phrase is known as a "thought-terminating cliché" because it can be invoked to shut down a rational debate. We are all "for the children," and we all want the best for all children, especially our own. Jesus himself was a caring advocate for children (see Matthew 18:3; 19:13-14; Mark 10:13-14; Luke 18:15-16). So there is nothing wrong with a leader expressing honest caring and concern for children.

What is manipulative and dishonest is when our so-called leaders prey on our love for children and manipulate us with emotional appeals. When politicians want to expand their power by raising

our taxes, they tell us that budget cuts would cause schools to decline, and kids would no longer have textbooks, pencils, and school lunches for their hungry bellies—as if there were not a dime of fat to be trimmed in the rest of the budget.

Meanwhile, the taxes we already pay are being raided by these very same politicians through fraud, graft, payoffs, and cronyism. After the people vote

out there who are looking for us to make decisions and choices about how we're going to better fund education."

It was a classic thought-terminating cliché, a case of misdirection, as when a magician gestures with his right hand so you don't notice the card up his left sleeve. "Stop talking about scandal and talk about educating kids instead. Do it for the children." Her emotional

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***The leadership model of Jesus
is based on a love that casts out fear
(see 1 John 4:18).***

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themselves higher taxes, supposedly "for the children," the children will be no better off than they were before—but the politicians and the special interests will be richer than ever.

The "for the children" appeal is often used to change the subject when a leader gets in trouble. A few years ago a presidential candidate got into trouble because of some unsavory associations in his past. So his wife went on NBC's Today show to make an emotional appeal that we all stop talking about her husband's unwholesome connections and focus instead on the needs of "the children." She told the interviewer, "We've got to move forward. You know, this conversation doesn't help my kids. It doesn't help kids

appeal, while effective, actually turns logic on its head. If we really care about children, we should be very concerned about the character and associations of the person who is going to lead our nation and ultimately influence our kids' education. Manipulative emotional appeals have a tendency to lead people to mistaken conclusions.

Manipulators and con men tug at our heartstrings to control us and gain power over us. But Jesus, the quintessential leader, always told the truth and appealed to the intellect and the will. He told his followers, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31b-32).

How Jesus Answered Power

In John 13, we see Jesus, hours before the crucifixion, wrapping a towel around his waist, filling a basin with water, and washing the feet of the disciples. Washing feet was a job for the lowest servant in the household. Jesus taught by his words and his example that those who would lead must be servants to their followers.

Jesus showed us that the way up is down, the master is the servant, the greatest is the least, and the way to exaltation is to take up one's cross daily and follow Jesus (see Luke 9:23). Whereas Niccolò Machiavelli taught that leadership is a ruthless and relentless quest for power, Jesus taught that leadership is servanthood. The leadership model of this world is based on control, manipulation, and fear. The leadership model of Jesus is based on a love that casts out fear (see 1 John 4:18).

After washing the feet of his disciples, Jesus said to them, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

Jesus rejected the world's definition of power. He did not seek power by manipulating and controlling people. He derived his power from God. He exercised that power through love. He

extended his power to his followers and safeguarded that power against abuse by commanding his followers to love one another. A leader who loves his people will never manipulate or exploit them. He will seek only what is best for them.

The most widely recognized symbol of Christianity is the cross. It's a wonderful symbol because it speaks of obedience and love—the obedience of Jesus to God the Father and the love of Jesus for lost humanity.

But there is another symbol of Christianity that we rarely see: the symbol of the basin and towel. This is the symbol of humble Christian service. The basin and towel are the tools of the Servant-Leader who washed his followers' feet. All of these symbols are marks of Christian leadership because they stand for the leadership style of Jesus—his humility, his servanthood, his obedience, and his love. These symbols suggest to us our next leadership principle:

PRINCIPLE 10

Authentic leaders derive their greatest power from obeying God and serving others.

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LEARNING TO LEAD FROM THE MASTER

You are a leader. Whether the venue is your church, a civic organization, a company, or your family, Michael Youssef's new book, *The Leadership Style of Jesus*, is for you. In it, you will learn how adopting Jesus' leadership example will transform your effectiveness. With Jesus as the standard, Dr. Youssef considers how to deal with the temptations and pressures you confront as a leader—facing loneliness, handling criticism, using power wisely, and passing the torch to others.

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“Michael Youssef is a remarkable pastor and a great Christian leader. In this book, he looks to Jesus Christ and draws important lessons for us all—lessons every Christian leader should take to heart and put to practice.”

—R. Albert Mohler Jr.

Author of *The Conviction to Lead*

